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Bob Wiedrich The iron fist that never lets up



THE RECENTLY DISCLOSED Soviet secret police plot to blackmail an American military attache into becoming a double agent is another reason for cooling relations with Moscow until the Russians learn to behave.

Ever since World War II, and probably long before that, Soviet operatives have been stealing American military and political secrets in an unending, undeclared intelligence war.

During that time, their spying has been expanded to include the theft of United States technology as well as the outright pirating of internationally patented techniques whose owners should be rightfully compensated in a civilized world.

Worse, the Soviets have accompanied their thievery with repeated military and political incursions on foreign soil where they have no legitimate business if they are genuinely pursuing peace.

For 35 years, they have committed all manner of mischief and subversion, either with their own personnel or those of such surrogates as Cuba, East Germany, and other captive nations.

IN SHORT, the Soviets have done everything possible to topple the Western democracies and accomplish their oft-stated goal of world domination.

They have lied and distorted facts. They have supported terrorist movements against duly constituted governments. They have fomented revolution throughout the world and supplied arms to tyrants.

They have forced the U.S. and other Free World countries into an arms race that no one can win and that threatens to bankrupt national treasuries.

And they have done so with the supreme confidence of an irresponsible little boy who knows he may cause an innocent giant discomfort by giving him a surreptitious hotfoot.

Thus, the attempted blackmail of the military attache assigned to the American embassy in Moscow comes as no surprise to those who have watched the heavy-handed Russians at work for more than three decades.

What makes this attempt—unsuccessful as it may have been—particularly sinister is the fact that the target of Soviet attention, Army Maj. James Holbrook, was an officer possibly in line for an appointment as a special military adviser on Soviet affairs to Vice President Bush's staff.

It is to Holbrook's credit that he had the courage to report the incident immediately to superiors, however embarrassing it may have been to him.

Had he been made of less stern stuff, he might have caved in to the KGB demands and given the Soviets a strategically placed informant in the White House.

And who knows what consequences that listening post might have had for the Reagan administration as it pursues its no-nonsense policy toward Moscow in an era of ever-encroaching Soviet moves around the globe.

Nobody expects the Russians to conduct themselves otherwise. Their die is cast. And world domination and the destruction of capitalism are their aims.

However, in watching this scenario develop, along with others of similar vein in recent years, it always amazes me how many naive Americans of self-proclaimed noble and liberal persuasion can work so actively to cripple the counter-intelligence efforts of their own country.

Spying is not a gentleman's game. Drugging a military attache and posing his inert carcass in bed with a woman before cameras is probably the least of the dirty tricks employed by the KGB.

BUT SOME people in America keep insisting that you can treat the Russians as though they conduct themselves by normal, civilized rules of behavior.

Thus, the same people—however well intentioned—also insist that our intelligence apparatus fight its undeclared war with both hands tied while confronting an enemy who will go to any lengths to achieve its objectives.

The same criticism goes for those Americans—farmers and the politicians who cater to them—who claim the Soviet grain embargo has been more punishing to our economy than to the Russians.

They ignore the fact that in circumventing the embargo, the Soviets have had to spend cherished Western hard currencies to make up the grain shortfall on world markets.

And they refuse to concede that these are resources that might otherwise have been spent on buying even more arms with which to threaten the West or to ease growing Soviet citizen dissent with more consumer goods.

Sen. Charles Percy, (R., Ill.), the new Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman, told me recently he will ask Congress to require that future presidential embargoes prohibit all commerce with a foreign nation until it mends its ways. Selective embargoes henceforth would be barred, thereby eliminating charges of undue hardship on just one segment of the economy.

An across-the-board embargo would underscore the message that uncivilized conduct among nations will not be tolerated. It also would tell the Russians that the U.S. recognizes their tyrannical policies for what they are and will not dignify them by remaining silent.